

PAT RINALDI *living her dream*



PAT RINALDI

Patricia "Pat" Rinaldi originally had plans to become a teacher, but her father, bowling center entrepreneur Nick Rinaldi, a "tough, strict Italian," told her to cancel those plans—she was to study business, he insisted. So after completing her education locally at Holy Cross High School and Immaculata Junior College, Ms. Rinaldi traveled to Terre Haute, Ind., where she earned a business degree at St. Mary-of-the Woods College in

degree at St. Mary-of-the-Woods College in 1966.

She returned to the area and immediately began working in the bowling business at one of her father's centers—Rinaldi's Riverdale Bowl. After working for a few years with her family, however, she felt the need to become her own person and find her own way; thus, she landed on Capitol Hill, where she enjoyed a 25-year career as an appointment secretary for three different congressmen from California. She loved politics, and a few trips to the San Diego/Palm Desert areas of the Golden State weren't bad either.

But the bowling business was always in the back of her mind, so in 1993 when the last of the congressmen she served announced plans to retire, Ms. Rinaldi also decided to leave the Hill and chose to come to the aid of her ailing father, who was on dialysis as a result of renal failure. She mostly watched and listened and learned the ways of Riverdale Bowl while providing physical assistance to her father as he continued to do things the only way he knew—his way.

When Mr. Rinaldi died in 1998, Pat Rinaldi, a legendary duckpin bowler (see sidebar, page 9), took the plunge and before year's end officially took control of the 32-lane tenpin center. It was there where she recently talked about bowling and life as a proprietor with editor Bob Cosgrove.

Was your taking over Riverdale Bowl a difficult task?

When my dad passed away, I'd always wanted a bowling center, and here it was. I worked something out with the bank, and I took over their mortgage. Actually what I did was find a broker who helped me—a nice lawyer who got me an SBA [Small Business Administration] loan. Through that, I said, *Okay, I want to keep it, and this is what I wanted* *to do*, so I was willing to mortgage everything that we had to keep it. So here I am. I have to work some place, so why not pursue your dream? I was either going to let it go or take it over. You've got to start somewhere, so I'm starting at the bottom and working up. That's how I got here.



Did you have any fears or concerns over taking over the center?

I didn't. I never even thought about it. I was just, *I'm going to do this*. It was like, I had the vision, I had the passion, I had the guts to do it. I never really worried about it; I just knew I could do this. I don't know how I knew I could do it, but it was just second nature to me. I just love this. I love bowling. I love being here—you have to. To run a bowling center, you've gotta love it because you're here all the time. And then bowl ... I'm a bowler, so I love that part of it, too. I bowl four nights a week. I'm constantly in a bowling center.

I'm still competitive enough in duckpins,

so that is fun for me, and this is fun, too, but this is my job. And when you love your job, it's not work—and it really isn't because I love this, and I love bowling, and, I hate to say it, I love tenpins, too. Duckpins will always be first in my heart because that's what I grew up with. It's a wonderful sport.

How did you first get involved with bowling?

My dad worked as a manager at Takoma Park Bowling Center in the early '50s, and that's where I learned to bowl. He taught me—actually my mother taught me because he was too busy running the bowling center. So I started when I was six years old. Duckpin [balls are] small anyway, but I still used two hands—I was that small. She used to read it in a book, what I'm supposed to do, and that's how I got my four-step delivery—from a book. I just did it from there. She taught me, and from then on I was hooked.

They had a poolroom upstairs at Takoma Park, and that's where I learned to shoot pool, too. So I evolved from there.

What's the first thing you did after taking over Riverdale Bowl to put your "personal stamp" on it?

I started to bring it into the millennium. I painted it. I changed the colors. If you remember, everything was orange; it

was a more '60s look, and I tried to turn that around, so first of all we painted.

My mechanic belonged to the Moose Club, and he had a friend at the Moose Club who was a painter. I didn't have any money; I was on a budget—I had nothing. I couldn't even tell you I was on a budget because I didn't have any money to budget!

So anything I did, I did through equipment leasing. I figured that was the only way to do it. I got a lane machine that worked. I did masking units, and like I said, we did the painting. I installed Smart Seats[™] to cover the seats.

The first carpet we got in, it was a carpet we got from the Moose Club that was in an

Pat Rinaldi – duckpin legend

NCABA Hall of Famer Henry Fankhauser, who has witnessed many women duckpin bowlers during his more than 50 years of covering the sport, says that Pat Rinaldi is one of the best he has ever seen, and her record proves it.

Among her notable accomplishments in duckpins:

✓ First president of the Women's National Duckpin Association (WNDA) and a member of its Hall of Fame (inducted in 1993)

✓ Member of the National Duckpin Bowling Congress Hall of Fame (1989).

✓ Nation's top-ranked woman bowler for six consecutive years (1978-83).

✓ Ranked in the Top 10 for approximately the last 30 years.

✓ Currently ranked No. 2 in the Washington, D.C. area—was No. 1 for the 2002-03 season.

 \checkmark Four Ladies Professional Duckpin Tour (LPDT) titles and has one WNDA Tour victory.

✓ 1981 and 1982 LPDT Bowler of the Year.

 \checkmark Her high game of 256 at White Oak Lanes in Silver Spring is a local record.

In addition to her tenpin league at Riverdale, Rinaldi still bowls in three duckpin leagues each week.

"I've accomplished basically everything there is to accomplish in duckpins," she said, "but I'm always challenged to do better."



old storage room, so I got it for like \$300, and one of my bowlers lays carpet, and he says, "I can lay the carpet for you." So it was like a group effort. It was like one of those "fix-me-upper" things you see on TV; everybody was helping out, and it was just great.

So we hand-painted the whole place, and this is a big place to paint. We had plastic all over the place, we had to cover the lanes—it was a nightmare. We painted, we got new masking units, a new carpet—we started fixing up, little by little, every piece that I could. Any little bit of money that I could come up with, I was going to start to dress this place up. And we did.

Then my lanes went out; they started to buckle. I thought, *Omigod, What am we going to do?*

Literally, you would throw the ball, and at the first seam, the ball would jump. *What are we going to do? I'll be out of business*. So I talked and I talked to leasing companies finally got these guys to listen to me, they just bought into me, and they split the lease because they wouldn't do 32 [lanes] because it was too much money. It was \$200,000, and I wasn't a proven commodity, so, Are we going to take a chance on this woman?

What am I going to do? So we got two leasing companies, and each of them did 16 [lanes]. I said, "Okay! We're there. We can do this; we can do it!" And sure enough, we did, and we put the new lanes down. We took care of all that—and that was a big one.

We started building consistency with that lane machine. I've got a good lane machine;

I put that shot out there and never changed it—never looked back.

[The] NABI [tournament organization] wasn't happy with me because they started here, and they wanted me to change the shot because it was "too easy" for them. I said, "Listen, it took me too long to get here. I'm sorry, I can't do this; I just can't do it. I'd love to do, it but I can't." So I just went from there.

What major tasks have yet to be done?

I need a new carpet; I have to do that. I want to fix up the ladies' room; I have to finish that. There will always be something to do. It's like a work in progress. I'm always doing something to make it better.

Just put a new roof on—\$130,000 on that. I refinanced the mortgage, and that's the only reason I was able to put the new Qubica system in there. That was \$260,000 right there.

I tried to piecemeal the roof—big mistake. These guys were doing it on the side—big mistake. I come to find out they were using inferior quality up there. I had to pay for all of it to be ripped up and put down again. So this was not good—this was not good.

Everytime before when it rained and it leaked all over the place, you'd see the buckets we had behind the machines. I prayed, *Just not on the lanes—anywhere but there!* Anywhere we could put a bucket, go ahead!

We've got one little leak left, and I've got to get the guy to come back from Baltimore can't find him, of course, but other than that, we're good. So we're got our new roof, our new lanes, and a new security system so people feel safer.

We have a light show—that was a big one to put in. You have to do that; you have to have one for the open play and the kids. The league bowlers aren't crazy about it, but they like to do it once in a while.

Landscaping, we've already started that. If I had money, I'd put a new parking lot out there. But right now, I just stripe it every year. I just work to keep it looking like it does now.

What has surprised you the most?

The biggest surprise to me? Everything cost *thousands*—nothing cost hundreds. *Thousands*. I could not believe that. In this business, no matter what it is, it's *thousands* of dollars. Not little thousands. We're talking lane machine—\$20,000. *Omigod!* Masking units—\$20,000.I said, "What about \$2,000?" The ball cleaner—\$8,000.

I didn't know that. I got into a big one on that—money. But that's okay. It's a big business. It's a bigger business than people think it is. You come into a bowling center, and it just runs. People don't think about it—what it costs and what it takes to run a bowling center. All those lanes.

The electricity costs \$7,000 a month. *What is wrong with this*? I keep saying, "Pepco, you need to come out here. What is the problem? Why is this? You're supposed to be efficient!" No.

Got a new air conditioner. It was supposed to cut down [our costs]. No. We took it up.

I got my new air conditioner through

Pepco. I said, "Okay, I need a new air conditioner. What can you do for me?"

They said, "We're going to get you an efficient one. You're going to save money."

I don't have to tell you—it didn't happen. I thought, *Omigod, now what*? But it works.

When I came here, the air conditioner was the original—40 years old—and it was not working. It was 80 degrees in here, and people were just dripping. So that's another thing I had to do.

I've done most of the major stuff, but the biggest surprise was how much it costs and how much it costs to keep it like this. That's what people don't realize.

What's been your most difficult decision since taking over the center?

Probably fixing the men's room before the ladies' room—that was rough for me. But I had to do it because the men's room was in such bad shape. That was my big decision on doing that.

Actually, I really haven't had any tough decisions. I've loved everything, knock on wood, I've just been real lucky, real fortunate, the way that everything has fallen into place for me.

What do you like most about your job?

Everything. The bowling. The people. Watching the people. Giving to them and watching them love what they do. I love what I do, and it makes me happy to give things to people. I'm giving them a place that is the best I can do. And that makes me feel good.

So that's what I like most: Watching the people and watching them have a good time because that's what it's all about for me. I'm not in it to expand and go on and on and on; this is it. And I want it to be good, and I want it to stay good, and I want people to be happy here. That makes me happy. It's a *feel-good* place.

a lot of it. We've all worked together like a family.

I guess I can say they've bought into my dream to make it the best, and they're proud of it, so it makes it easy to come to work.

What's your least favorite task?

Paperwork—I hate it. It's a pain in the neck.

By far, I hate to go into that office. I love to be out talking to people about bowling and watching them. But I think most people will tell you that, too.

Do you consider yourself a demanding owner?

I just like things to be the best they can be. So I do get on people's nerves because I kinda constantly remind them that I would like it to be the best it can be. You can probably talk to my employees, and they could tell you probably better than I could if I am demanding.

Sometimes if you are a woman, you can be *bitchy*; if you're a man, you're *demanding*. I just want it to be the best it can be, whatever that is. That's all I ask of them—to do the best they can. That's all I ask. That's fair. They can't do any more; they can't do any less. Just give me the best you can, and I'm okay.

And I will be their worst nightmare, of course, if things don't get fixed! I hate to micro-manage. I didn't like to be micro-managed myself, but I will do it if I have to. If I have to hold a hand, I will hold a hand. But I want them to do it, and I want them to feel good about what they do, too. And they do.

My mechanics will go, *Oh, here she comes* because I walk the lanes and I bowl on them, so I know.

I'll say, "Are those pins on-spot?"

"Well, they're within"

"I don't care if they're 'within'-Are they

I am just so happy to be in debt. That's a stupid thing to say, isn't it?

This is a people business. You have to relate to people to make this work. People know if you're honest and feel it or not or if you're just a money person and you come in and all you're in this for is to make money. That's not why I'm in this business. I'm in this business to make it the best bowling center I can for all those people out there and for me, too. I want to be proud of it—and I am.

I'm proud of the people who work here, I'm proud of what we've done, what we've accomplished, and they take pride in it, too. You can just see 'em; they like working here because they're proud because they've done *on-spot*? This is where they're supposed to be; I want them there. As close as you can get to that spot, that's what I want."

By being a part of it and by bowling here, nobody can really let things slide because they know I'm going to come back to them.

So I guess you could say I'm a *little* demanding, but I just demand they do the best they can, that's all. I'm not *overly* demanding; I just like things nice.

Have there been any thoughts about expanding the center?

I'd love to. I'd love to knock the wall out and add at least eight more lanes to [make it] 40, but I don't know if I can do it, though. I'd have to check with [the Maryland-National Capital] Park and Planning [Commission].

I found some plans upstairs that my dad was planning on expansion. I know it was eight or 12 [lanes] that he wanted to put in. There's a small creek that's [in the expansion area], and I don't know if they will allow it.

The other problem we'd have is parking. They have that parking lot in the shopping center [behind the bowling center], and at nighttime, we could use it. I'm sure we could make an arrangement with them to park there. So that probably would work out, but other than that, we'd have to expand on the other side of the parking lot [behind the adjacent Shell gas station]. I'd have to buy that Shell station area, and I don't know how that would work with this and that, but it would be kinda neat. It would be nice to have it.

It's not out of the question if it's feasible—if Park and Planning would allow it. If they wouldn't allow it, that would take care of that.

I always said I should have put a second story on before I [installed] the air conditioner to just [build] *up* 'cause I can't go *out*!

What's the craziest event you've experienced here?

My roofers set my roof on fire when they put my new roof up about four months ago. That's the *craziest* thing that's happened.

The place was filled on a Monday night at 7:30. My roofers are up there. I'm up and down the ladders everyday going up there; I'm like my own general contractor, up and down talking to 'em. I get up there and see this torch that they [use to] lay their roofs with hot rubber.

I said, "You know, you're awful close to that insulation over there near the air conditioning. You sure you should be doing this over there?"

"Oh, yes ma'am. Don't worry about it. You just got to be real careful."

I said, "Ahh, okay. You're going to be *real* careful, right?"

"Yeah."

So I go back down to the office, and I start smelling stuff. A bowler comes in and said, "Pat..."

I go, "They said *no problem;* it's just the tar." I smell it again, and I say, "You know, this isn't good!"

I go outside. Smoke is coming through the return duct. I said, "Oh, shh..."—you *know* what I said!

I go up on the roof and say, "It's on fire! It's on fire!"

So I have to come in and call 911. The fire department comes. Had to make the announcement [to the bowlers]: I said, "Tell 'em they have to leave. They gotta get outta here ... as *easily* as we can. Come on!"

The scariest thing was to see your whole life go *pffft!* before you in a second. It's like

everything you own, your whole dream, everything is gonna be gone, up in smoke. You finally get a new roof, and they burn your place down!

The scoring system had just been put in; all this was going on at once because, like I said, I refinanced and I had the money to do it.

Luckily, it turned out all right—no other problems—so we were okay. I just had to get my painter back and say, "You see over there, a few more strokes are needed."

What's been your best decision made thus far here?

Mortgaging my life to take this bowling center over. I am just so happy to be in debt. That's a stupid thing to say, isn't it?

I'm telling you, this is a dream come true, and I would do it again in a heartbeat. It's worth all the aggravation and the frustration and the worries and everything that went on. I look back and I wonder, *How in the heck did I do all this?* I look out there sometimes because it doesn't look anything like it did before step by step by step, day by day by day, just doing little things, and, it's like, all of a sudden, it's here. It's there! I'd do it again.

Sometimes I come out here at night like last night when we closed up, and I just walk around when it's quiet and nobody's in here and just, I said to myself, *Wow! I did this. This is all right. You'd be proud, dad.* You know? This is o-kay. It just gives you a feeling inside—a feel-good—because you have developed it like this.

And your worst decision?

Those roofers that I found! Oh please, don't use *me* as a reference—don't do that! Bad decision.

Luckily, I can't say that I've lived to regret any of those major decisions yet. I'm still in that euphoric state that everything is going fine. I haven't really made any drastic mistakes. And I don't think about them, so maybe that's good.

Maybe I haven't been in business long enough—it's only been six years. I don't know what's coming. My whole future's ahead of me.

Was there an idea you had that simply did not work?

Not with any great consequences. Not really, everything's been okay. I've tried some customer appreciation tournaments, but for some reason, they don't seem to buy into it. I don't know what it is. I end up, basically, for a dollar, paying out about \$1,000 to them. It's for *them*. I have a hard time getting them to understand, this is for *you*—it's not for me. I'm not in this to make money; this is for *you* to make money.

I haven't run any great tournaments that

have failed or anything. I haven't done that. In one way, I'm lucky because I don't have time for tournaments. A lot of people want me to have tournaments, but I don't know how to fit 'em in because we're so busy. I've just taken on the [Eastern Major Mixed Traveling] league—they've been here twice now. I have two teams that I sponsor, so they come here and that's good.

More and more, I might try to do something on Saturdays. But I have my leagues come in at 5 [p.m.], and they came from [AMF] University. They came over here, and they got just frustrated because their leagues were always getting canceled for the tournaments, and I promised them I wouldn't do it. I promised, so I've gotta keep my word. So I don't have time.



So if I can fit 'em in on Sundays and maybe once in a while—the kids, we can put them off a week—but that's about the only time I have.

Other than, perhaps, the return of the roofers, what's your biggest worry today?

When my dad built this, for some reason, it is below the level of the street. We had a flood that came through the side door, and the water came in on the carpet [behind] the first 10 lanes and went into the storage room and down into the bowlers' circle.

I went out and bought sandbags and 50 pounds of sand at the hardware store. So I load 'em in my truck, and I get my guys and me and we're all down there. We're filling sandbags, and we had 'em all at the door—

we were going to be *ready* this time when that hurricane came.

You know, someone stole my sandbags stole *half* of my sandbags. I was so mad! I said, "The only way to look at this was that they needed it worse than we do."

That is the biggest worry—a flood coming in here. The drainage isn't that great on Kenilworth Avenue, and it comes over. I'll have to figure a way to build a ditch out there because there's a drain at the other end. There's got to be something I can come up with.

I also have to get a new carpet. I'm always doing new things; I'll do some more new things around here. ... I want to go and see if I can get a new countertop [for the control desk], and that's going to be a pretty penny.

Are scores too high today?

No, I think it's great. A lot of people are saying that there are too many 300s. They'll say, "Well, your lanes are easy." But they're not *that* easy; there have only been 17 300s [in 2003-04]. If they were that easy, they'd be bowling them all the time every week, and they're not. People *need* to do accomplishments; they have to feel like they're being accomplished in any kind of sport.

I don't want people going out of here and beating up their steering wheels, saying, "I can't hit this place. What's wrong with me? I can't bowl anymore; I'm going to quit. I'm going to give up it. Never going to bowl again!" That's not good for the business—that's not good at all. And that's why I think every center should do the best they can to make it score as well as they can for the people.

Now if you want a challenging shot, go to the Sport [Bowling] shot or whatever. You can find those places around. But for the average bowler, they want to go out and have fun, drink a couple beers, enjoy themselves, gamble, do their brackets, and go home happy. That's what I want for them. I don't want them beating themselves up—forget it, they'll quit.

That's like bowling center people. They say, "Won't you be happiest if another center closed around here?"

I said, "No."

They say, "Why not? You'd get more business."

I said, "It's not good for the industry!"

There's enough bowlers for everybody really, for all of us. They can pack 'em in; you just have to work at it. I don't want to see any more centers close.

How long have you bowled tenpins?

When I took over, I started to bowl, so I guess it's been six years now. I started with my Bugs Bunny ball. I am not by any means a terrific tenpin bowler; I can carry my own, See RINALDI, page 16

THE WRIGHT WAY • DON WRIGHT



Interesting tidbits

There's a writer out there who loves to say, "That's Journalism 101." Since my degree is in criminal justice, not journalism, I have made a folder labeled "Journalism 101" and keep his critiques handy as research.

Now research I enjoy. While working on my degree, we had to do a lot of research into constitutional law, Supreme Court decisions and matters affecting probation, parole, juvenile justice, and corrections. Most students hate research. Not me. Research opens so many doors and in my mind works like a history lesson.

So, I did some general research as well as bowling research and thought I would share some of the interesting tidbits I found:

✓ The WIBC was founded in 1916. A gallon of milk sold for 36 cents, and you could buy a three-bedroom house for \$2,875.

✓ Michigan tops the states for most combined bowling membership with 278,007.

✓ The Aleda E. Lutz VA Medical Center in Saginaw, Mich., was established in September 1950 and is dedicated in honor of Lt. Aleda E. Lutz, U.S. Army Nurse Corps, a distinguished female veteran, avid bowler, and member of the Saginaw WBA.

✓ Dagwood Bumstead of the comic strip *Blondie* was inducted into the Greater Detroit Bowling Association Hall of Fame.

✓ The first 700 series in WIBC was rolled by Marie Clemensen of Chicago. She rolled a 712 during the 1934 WIBC Tournament, and the record held for 38 years.

✓ The first 300 bowled in a WIBC Tournament was rolled by Lori Gensch of Milwaukee. She bowled the perfecto at Cactus Bowl, in Tucson, Ariz., on May 7, 1979.

✓ Pennsylvania has 404 bowling centers.
Rhode Island has eight. Japan has 1,100.
✓ In 1929, Skang Mercurio bowled 65 consecutive errorless games, missing the

10-pin in the ninth frame of Game 66. And we think a good night is three clean games.

✓ Chris Schenkel provided commentary for the PBA Tour for 36 years. Most of us would love to have him and Bo Burton back in the booth today.

✓ As of July, there were 6,024 bowling centers in the U.S. The BPAA Web site in October 2004 reflects a membership of 3,300 centers.

 ✓ The average U.S. bowling center has 19.9 lanes. The average Texas center has 26.4 lanes. Nevada averages 32.6 lanes.
✓ The worldwide average is 20.1 lanes.

✓ During the 1996-1997 season, YABA bowlers earned 806 awards for a perfect game. During the 2002-2003 season, youth bowlers rolled 1,341 300 games. For the same time periods, WIBC awarded 714 and 946, respectively, while ABC awarded 33,276 and 44,937. With a decline in membership across the board, have bowlers really improved *that* much? ✓ Mike Scroggins, Amarillo, Tex., a current PBA touring professional, holds the ABC record for most 800s in a year

with 15. ✓ "Celebrity Bowling" aired in 1971. The 26 half-hour shows were filmed in three

days. The host was Jed Allen. ✓ The *Neiman Marcus Christmas Book* is offering His 'n' Hers Bowling Center with a starting price of \$1.45 million.

 \checkmark Garden Bowl in Detroit, built in 1912, claims it is the oldest bowling alley in the country in its original location.

✓ Saratoga Lanes in Maplewood, Missouri was established in 1916 and claims to be the oldest bowling alley west of the Mississippi.

✓ Holler House in Milwaukee, Wis., an historic corner tap, claims it is home to the nation's oldest bowling alley—two lanes in the basement.

✓ Don Wright is one of the most honored political cartoonists in the country. He has won the Pulitzer Prize twice, the Sigma Delta Chi Award for Distinguished Service in Journalism twice, the Inter American Press Award three times, the

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though. I got up to 170, and I'm off to a good start this year—I've got 74 [a 174 average], and my goal is 80. I can do this.

[A game of] 300, I think, is out of the question, but you never know. Never say never. I'm not one of those people to say never, but I'd love to do it. They ask me if I did it would I write myself a check [for \$300, which Riverdale bowlers receive for a perfect game]? I definitely would write myself a check, *believe me*, and frame it.

I really do enjoy it. [Longtime league bowler and employee] Bill Malloy tried to teach me a little bit. He taught me how to shoot the 10-pin cross-alley because in duckpins, I shoot it right down the gutter, and it drives everybody crazy how I can do that. He showed me how to do it cross-alley, so I don't mind it in tenpins. In duckpins, whew! It's really cutting it close. But pretty much I bowl the same, and I enjoy it. The ball is just a little heavier.

Do you find yourself as competitive in tenpins?

I'm getting there. At first I wasn't with my Bugs Bunny ball, and I thought, *Well, I'm just* going to do it to know how to do it. And then I got a little more into it and a little *more* into it.

I think this year, I'm quite settled down a little more, and I can be a little more competitive. I have not bowled in a tournament yet. Actually, to be honest with you, I've never bowled tenpins anywhere but here, except in college. I was just on a date and went bowling—and I never should have done that because I beat him. I didn't know how to do it, but I just did.

But I'm starting to get a little competitive, thinking maybe I should try a tournament. I don't know if I could bowl on another lane because these are the only lanes I know.

Overseas Press Club Award five times, the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Journalism Award twice, the Reuben Award from the National Cartoonists Society twice, the National Headliner Award, and the Best of Cox Award twice.

Oh! There's that *journalism* word again—different Don Wright.

Don Wright, a member of the Bowling Writers Association of America, is a past president of the Southern Bowling Writers Association. His E-mail address is wrightdk@rr.hot.com and his Web site is located at sparetimebowling .com.